



THE SALVATION ARMY
BOOTH
COLLEGE

Guidelines for Reading & Notemaking

Reading plays an important role when studying, mainly because learning becomes more student centred at this level. This means that teachers cease to be the only source or even the major source of information for students. Lectures and tutorials do supply students with vital information, but this information is more like a set of guidelines as to the approach they need to take in acquiring knowledge in a particular subject. To get a broader outlook, students need to use this information as a springboard and search for more knowledge in the same area. Reading has much to offer students in this respect, because it is one of the important ways of bridging the gap between knowledge acquired at lectures/tutorials and the vast knowledge that still needs to be explored. Throughout studies, notemaking is closely linked with reading, and so plays an equally important role. This is mostly because it enhances reading in many different ways.

1. It helps you concentrate on what you are reading and stops your mind from wandering.
2. It helps you better understand and evaluate the information you are reading.
3. It helps you store the information you acquire for future occasions.
4. It helps you form links between the information you have read and the knowledge you have already acquired through other means.
5. It helps you gather information from different sources and put it together to get a broader perspective and to draw your own conclusions.

Efficient reading techniques as well as good notemaking techniques will undoubtedly ease your way through your studies. To become good at both, the process of reading and notemaking needs to be handled in several stages: Pre-reading, reading and notemaking.

Pre-Reading

The purpose of pre-reading is to become familiar with the text you are about to read. You do this by getting as much general information about the text as possible. This is similar to what you do when you have to familiarise yourself with a new place. You usually try to locate the

important units/divisions in the place, rather than look at one unit/division in detail. For example, on your first day on campus, you might note where the library is, but postpone looking through it until you get a more general idea of the layout of the whole campus.

Pre-reading can be done in 3 short steps: survey, skim, select. You *survey a book* by looking for particular information like title; author (name, qualifications, etc.); and publication details (publisher, date and place of publication etc.), as well as by glancing through the Preface; Introduction; Contents; and Index pages. You *survey an article* by looking at title/author/publication details, as well as the synopsis/abstract. The survey gives you a very general idea about the text you are going to read and helps you anticipate some of the information presented in the text.

You *skim a book* by reading chapter headings and sub-headings; chapter introductions and summaries; questions, if any, at the back of chapters; information that is given special attention by different type face, different colour print, boxed areas etc.; and also graphics along with their captions. You *skim an article* by reading headings and subheadings; first and last paragraphs; beginnings and ends of paragraphs; and also graphics. Skimming focuses the general information you have already acquired about the text and leaves you with a fairly good idea about what information is important and where you can find it. In fact, it provides you with an outline similar to what the writer may have had when writing up the information, and also a set of questions about the information you need to get from the text.

You *select* by identifying the sections that are important for your purpose. For example, if your purpose is to write a summary of a book chapter/article, you need to have detailed information about the structure of the text - how the major facts/arguments are organised, what controlling idea/thesis is supported by these facts/arguments and what conclusions are drawn after the exposition/discussion. So, to do a summary of the text you need to mark out the sections where this vital information is given. But, if your purpose is to find information for an essay, you need to have only a general awareness of text structure to lead you to the information relevant for your assignment and to help you place this information within the broader framework of the whole text. If on the other hand, your purpose is studying for an examination, you need to be guided by a set of anticipated questions and mark out the sections that carry the answers to these questions.

Reading

This is intensive reading, which means you read *carefully* and *critically*. Read only the sections you identified before as useful for your purpose. Read with an eye for the main points/arguments in the sections. This is usually given at the beginning and end of paragraphs. Check to see whether the information you have read is the information you really need. You can do this by matching the new information with the questions you made beforehand. If you are reading for an essay you can also see whether the new information fits in with the basic essay plan you have made. When you are sure you are getting what you really wanted, read for details.

- Find how the main points/arguments are supported.
- Reflect on whether this information is all new to you or whether you have read it before in another source. Make mental links with this pre-knowledge and consider whether you need to take down the information again.
- Analyse and evaluate the information you are reading. Are main points/arguments well-supported? Is this supporting information acceptable? Does the writer contradict himself/herself? Does s/he agree or not with other experts you have read before and for what reasons? Are his/her main points supporting the thesis? Is his/her conclusion acceptable in terms of the information presented before?

Notemaking

There are two important things to remember when making notes:

1. Make an organised set of notes.
2. Avoid plagiarism.

To make an organised set of notes it is important to set up the page systematically. One method you can follow is to have a boxed area at the top of the page for bibliographic details, a narrow margin at the left for page/paragraph numbers etc., a broad margin in the middle for your notes from the text and a less broad margin at the right for personal comments. The middle column is strictly for noting down things from the text you are reading. Organise this information as clearly as possible. One method is to note the main points/arguments and their supporting evidence separately side by side.

Eg.

MAIN POINTS/ARGUMENTS	SUPPORTING EVIDENCE
"University students have many problems initially"	New learning style Financial problems Loneliness

Taking down the information in a question and answer format is another good method. You can do this by writing down the questions you were planning to ask the text on one side of your notes column and the information that answers the questions on the other side. If you happen to be a visual learner, that is if you tend to remember things better through pictures, you may even put the information in the text into diagrams. The column on the far right is your 'thinking column'. Here you note down anything from questions and clarifications to your personal reactions to the text and brilliant ideas that come up while you read. Remember that reading is a process that needs your active participation. The more efficient you become in your reading, the more comments you will make on what is being read.

The 'thinking column' indicates how well you are understanding and responding to the material. Also, this is where you will be storing original ideas for future use, which you might lose if you did not note down immediately. The 'thinking column' also indicates the gaps in your reading, because here you will jot down the areas/topics/points you need to follow up later. Making an organised set of notes saves you a lot of time and energy, whatever your reading purpose may be.

To avoid plagiarism, you can follow two important rules.

1. Underline the exact phrases/sentences etc. that you take down from the text, so that you will use them only within inverted commas when you are doing your assignment.
2. Paraphrase/summarise the information you have in brief note form in your own words. The best way to do this is by putting the original text away and using only the brief notes you have made in the middle column. (This will enable you to get away from the grammatical structure in the text and also from the original vocabulary, except proper names, numbers, formulae etc. which may have to be retained). However, your paraphrase/summary will closely reflect, as it should, the meaning expressed in the original text, because you are guided by the basic structure of the main ideas and supporting details in the original which are accurately recorded in your brief notes.